

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 SSM-03 HA-05 ACDA-12
DOE-11 SOE-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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R 211130Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6938
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1008

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR SY IZ
SUBJ: SYRO-IRAQI BAATHI CONFLICT LIKELY TO ENDURE

1. HAMOUD SHOEFI, FOREIGN MINISTER DIRECTOR OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS
AND HIMSELF A ONE-TIME TOP RANKING OFFICIAL OF THE SYRIAN
BAATH, EXPLAINED TO AMBASSADOR FEBRUARY 14 WHY HE FORESAW
NO LIKELIHOOD OF RAPPROACHMENT BETWEEN THE SYRIAN AND IRAQI
BAATH PARTY LEADERSHIPS.

2. SHOEFI SIAD HE CONSIDERED THE TWO LEADERSHIPS AS
COMPARABLE "ROYAL FAMILIES," NOTING THE RIF'AT-HAFEZ
AL-ASSAD DUUMVIRATE IN SYRIA AND BAGHDAD'S COUNTERPART OF
SADDAM HUSSEIN-AL-BAKR. BOTH CLAIM TO REPRESENT BAATH PARTY
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MAINSTREAM BUT NEITHER LEADERSHIP DID IN FACT
REPRESENT THEIR RESPECTIVE PARTIES AND EACH WAS NOTIVATED
BY STRONG PERSONAL DISLIKE OF THEIR RIVALS IN OTHER
CAPITAL.
THE ONLY DIFFERENCE SHOEFI SAW BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES
WAS THE GREATER MEASURE OF TOLERATION FOR "OLD BAATHIS"
IN BAGHDAD COMPARED TO THAT PREVAILING IN DAMASCUS.

(COMMENT: THIS PRESUMABLY MEANS THAT MEN LIKE SHOUI, WERE THEY IN BAGHDAD, WOULD BE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN PARTY POLITICS.)

3. IT WAS CURRENTLY POLITICALLY EXPEDIENT, HE COMMENTED, FOR DAMASCUS TO BE MAKING OVERTURES TO THE BAGHDAD REGIME, HOWEVER, NEITHER DAMASCUS NOR BAGHDAD WERE, IN HIS VIEW, TRULY SERIOUS IN THEIR INTENTIONS TO PATCH UP PAST DIFFERENCES. AS FOR IRAQ, SHOUI ASSERTED, BAGHDAD HAS ELECTED FOR ITSELF THE ROLE OF WHAT HE TERMED THE "FUTURE ILBRTESSIVE." THE SALEFDPITCH OF ITS LEADERSHIP IS THAT IRA Q WILL EVENTUALLY PLAY ARVAJOR IF NOT THE DOMINANT ROLE IN ARAB POLITICS. IN THE MAENTIME, THE MESSAGE IS THAT IRAQUES SHOULD DEVOTE THEIR ENERGY TO BUILDING SA STRONG COUNTRY SOCIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY AND NOT DISSIPATE THEIR ENERGIES IN ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THEIR COUNTRY.

4. TO AMBASSADOR'S COMMENT THAT SYRIA GENERALLY CREDITED IRAQ WITH SPONSORING A FAIR AMOUNT OF DIRTY TRICKS IN LABANON, SHOUI RESPONDED THAT SUCH ACTIVITIES, HOWEVER MUCH PUBLICIZED, DID NOT AMOUNT TO A SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT OF EITHER OF PRESTIGE OR RESOURCES. HE ACKNOWLEDGED IRAQ'S LEADERS SOUGHT TO MAKE LIFE DIFFICULT FOR DAMASCUS IN LEBANON, BUT CLAIMED THEY WERE NOT PREPARED TO ENGAGE IRAQ DEEPLY IN THIS EFFORT. HE DISCOUNTED RUMORS THAT SADDAM

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HUSSEIN'S REPORTED DISAGREEMENT WITH THE NATIONAL COMMAND OF THE IRAQI BAATH MIGHT SIGNAL A POTENTIAL SWITCH IN IRAQI POLICY TOWARDS RAPPROCHEMENT WITH SYRIA. SOUI NOTED THESE RUMORS PARALLELLED REPORTS GENGERATED BY SYRIA'S OWN INTELLIGENCE APPARATUS FOR LOCAL DISSEMINATION IN AN EFFORT TO JUSTIFY THE FEW GESTURES DAMASCUS HAD BEEN MAKING TO BAGHDAD.

5. COMMENT: SHOUI IS NEVER AT A LOSS IN ARTICULATELY ANALYZING LOCAL AND REGIONAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS. WE REPORT HIS VIEWS ON THIS ISSUE PRINCIPALLY BECAUSE OF HIS PAST RPOMINENCE IN THE SYRIAN BAATH, HIS CONTINUED CLOSE TIES WITH ELEMENTS OF THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP AS WELL ASWIGH DISSIDENTS OUTSIDE THE BAATH, AND , WE SUSPECT, EVEN WITH SOME IRAQ PARTY MEMBERS ACTIVE IN BAGHDAD.

MURPHY

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